UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CONF.85/L.37
13 July 1992

ENGLISH ONLY

SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 25 August-3 September 1992
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FIFTH CONFERENCE

Report for Switzerland

Paper submitted by Switzerland**

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* E/CONF.85/1/Rev.1.

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1. Summary

Since the last UN Conference on Geographic Names in Montreal an initiative was taken to establish a National Names Committee for Switzerland. The present legal situation provides for a Names Commission in each of the 26 Cantons, but not for a national one. A meeting in 1988 with representatives from most of these commissions did not feel a real need for a special national names authority, but welcomed instead a continuing exchange of information with all those institutions involved in this matter.

Names have already been collected for the map scales 1:5000 or 1:10000 covering the whole country. These activities continue for a more detailed inventory in connection with the completion of the cadastral surveys. The names commissions have mainly to determine on whether the written form of the collected toponym should follow the local dialect or the standardized language and to decide on the spelling of these names.

Work has been started for a toponymic data file of all names contained in the National Topographic Map Series. All names of the maps at 1:200'000 are already available on diskette. The report includes a list of available gazetteers. A decision has been taken also to publish a concise gazetteer on the basis of the above data file.

Being a multilingual country, exonyms are in common daily use in Switzerland, although a slight trend towards a reduction of their number may be noticed.

Due to the lack of an official names authority for the country, all activities on international level, like membership in the Dutch-German-speaking Division of UNGEGN or in the StAGN are based on personal initiative and interest of the respective experts and their institutions.

2. National and Regional Geographical Names Authorities

Switzerland has not yet established a national names authority as requested by the resolutions of the UN. This situation is due to the fact that the decree released by the Federal Government in 1970 [1] is still valid. It does not provide for a national body but states that each of the 26 Cantons has to install a Cantonal Names Commission with 3 to 5 members each and that the Cantons are responsible for further instructions on name collection and orthography. For some name classes, however, exceptions are provided, especially for the names of the smallest administrative units (communities), for all stations of the public transport systems and for post offices. As 5 of the 7 Federal Ministries are involved in names standardization, due to different Federal decrees, it would mean a major effort of interdepartemental coordination and legislation if a National Names Commission ought to be created. Such an action has low priority, because the Cantonal Names Commissions seem to function to everybody's satisfaction.

Following the Conference of Montreal the rapporteur has taken some steps in the direction of a national names authority. Three meetings were organized in which delegates participated from all Federal Government Offices that are involved in names standardization, namely the

- Federal Office of Topography (responsible for the names in the national topographical map series)
- Directorate of Cadastral Surveys (responsible for the names in the large scale cadastral plans and in the digital cadastral data base)
- Federal Office of Statistics (responsible for the gazetteer of administrative units)
- Federal Office of Traffic, represented by the General Directorate for the Federal Railways (names of the stations of the public transport systems) and the General Directorate of Post Services (responsible for the names of the post offices and bus stations)
- Division for International Organizations in the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs (responsible for the names of foreign countries)
- Institute of Cartography of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) Zurich (names in school atlases and in the National Atlas, liaison to multilateral bodies)

A first meeting was mainly devoted to an analysis of the whole situation and a discussion of some activities along the lines of the resolutions of the past U.N. names conferences. Thereafter the group examined also a list of different name categories which will be needed for legislation purposes in this field, especially in connection with new digital name files that will be part of the cadastral surveys, for which an entirely new concept is actually developed. Considering a National Names Authority the following tasks were proposed: i) to supervise and coordinate the activities of the Cantonal Names Commissions, ii) to function as an advisory body for

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1 Bundesbeschluss über Orts-, Gemeinde- und Stationsnamen vom 30.November 1970

the Federal Government, iii) to edit Federal instructions for the orthography of geographic names in all 4 linguistic areas and iv) to represent the country in international organizations.
In order to discuss these issues with the Cantonal Names Commissions a meeting was arranged in 1988 that gathered representatives from 19 Cantons and 5 Federal institutions. There was an intensive exchange of information on the present status and activities of these official bodies for geographic names and on the problems they are confronted with. It may be notable to mention that multilingual Cantons have a names commission for each of their language areas. No real need for a National Names Commission was expressed, but similar gatherings for the mutual exchange of information and experiences were welcomed.

3. Collection and Treatment of Names

Toponyms have been collected locally in connection with the field surveys for the General Topographic Plan 1:10000 / 1:5000 that covers the whole country. The delimitation of each name is given on a transparent overlay. The lists with records for each toponym have been treated by the Cantonal Names Commissions in close collaboration with the local authorities, community by community. Work on an even more detailed names inventory continues in connection with the cadastral surveys.
In a first phase the Cantonal name inventories took the form of a card file or a list for each community. These names collections were or are to be gradually transfered into Cantonal gazetteers or toponymic data files.
In the German-speaking part of Switzerland all decisions on official names are guided by the instructions for the collection and orthography of local names in cadastral surveys of 1948[2]. 10 Cantons have issued additional instructions, approved by the Federal Directorate of Surveys, to take care of regional peculiarities. The representatives of the Roman language area, on the other side, did not feel a need for general guidelines, the diversities being to large within each language area.
The main problem with which the regional names commissions are confronted, lies in the decision on whether a toponym should be written in its local dialectal form or in the form of the standardized language and on how generic terms are to be rendered in the first case. There is a prominent tendency towards the locally used dialect in the German- and Italian-speaking area but an opposite move in the French-speaking part of the country. Another problem concerns the street names, usually entirely in the responsibility of the local authorities, whose decisions may in certain cases not be in agreement with those of the names commission. The latter is often in favour of the dialect, while the community prefers for street names a form that is closer to the standardized language (e.g. "Chrüzbüel", but "Kreuzbühlstrasse" for the street name).

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2 Weisungen für die Erhebung und Schreibweise der Lokalnamen bei Grundbuchvermessungen in der deutschsprachigen Schweiz vom 27.Oktober 1948.

Names of larger regional entities that may concern more than one Canton are standardized on national level by the Federal Office of Topography. A few other name categories are handled according to Federal decrees: Community names may be changed only through official channels up to the Federal Governments. In the last decade the number of communities has decreased from 3029 in 1980 to 3018 in 1992 due to some amalgamations. A few changes of community names occured in bilingual areas. A complete record of the official names of all communities, districts and cantons is given in the gazetteer published by the Federal Office of Statistics[3] as the Official List of Swiss Communities. A new decree on rendering names of all stations of the public transport system and of post offices[4] has been issued by the Ministry of Transportation and Energy in 1988 that brings only minor changes in comparison to the former guidelines.

4. Toponymic Data Files

The Federal Office of Topography has started a project to establish a data base with all geographic names of the National Topographic Map Series. On the whole there will be some 250'000 records. By end of April 1992 22'000 names of the maps at the scales 1:200'000 and 1:100'000 have been entered. Each record consists of the official name, height and national grid coordinates as well as geographic latitude and longitude, a feature code, the maps sheets in which this name is contained and the Canton and Community to which it belongs. Up to now no rivers have been included. Diskettes with a provisional version of this data base can be purchased from the Federal Office of Topography (see address at the end of this report).
The new officially decreed cadastral data base includes a separate level for the names, the local names geometrically determined by the coordinates of their boundaries, toponyms only by a pair of coordinates (in metres).

5. Publications

A decision has been taken to edit, on the basis of the data file mentioned above, a concise gazetteer of Switzerland, including the approximately 9000 names of the map at 1:200'000 scale and all communities. It will be made available also on a diskette.
In the meantime the following publications might meet the needs:

i) Amtliches Gemeindeverzeichnis (see footnote[3]), 203 p.

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3 Bundesamt für Statistik / Office fédéral de la statistique: Amtliches Gemeindeverzeichnis der Schweiz / Liste officielle des communes de la Suisse / Elenco ufficiale dei comuni della Svizzera.- Bern / Berne, 1986.

4 Eidgenössisches Verkehrs- und Energiewirtschaftsdepartement / Département fédéral des transports, des communications et de l'énergie / Dipartimento federale dei trasporti, delle comunicazioni e delle energie: Richtlinien über die Festsetzung und Schreibweise der Stationsnamen und Namen von PTT-Dienststellen vom 1.März 1988 / Directives concernant la détermination et l'orthographe des noms des gares et des offices des PTT du 1ermars 1988 / Direttive concernenti la determinazione e l'ortografia dei nomi delle stazioni e degli uffici PTT del 1° marzo 1988.

ii) Neues Schweizer Ortslexikon / Nouveau Dictionnaire Géographique de la Suisse / Nuovo Dizionario Geografico della Svizzera.- Verlag / Edition / Edizione C.J.Bucher GmbH, München und Luzern. 23. vollständig neubearbeitete Auflage, 1983, 347 S.

iii) Every telephone directory contains some 4800 official names of the major settlements.

iv) The Index to Stations (in Switzerland)[5] of the official timetable, contains all stations with their official spelling.

Furthermore six Cantons have published gazetteers for their territories, in three others such work is under way.

In this context we might mention that as a first volume of the Historical Encyclopedia of Switzerland a gazetteer with historical toponyms has been published in 1991[6].

6. Reduction of the Exonyms

Maps for international use, produced in Switzerland, show the official names. Common exonyms are frequently used in official correspondence, in newspapers, in television and on road signs. In the German, the French and the Italian edition of the new school atlas[7], that is currently in print, corresponding German, French and Italian exonyms are used throughout, in order to be conform with the other media. The official names are occasionally added in the map in parentesis and added throughout in the names index.

A list of German, French, Italian and Rheto-roman exonyms of Swiss communities, that are recommended for common use, is given in the Official list of Swiss Communities (see footnote[3]). Several institutions contributed to a more extended list that includes also features other than settlements as well as references to names that are no longer in current usage. It proved to be impossible to decide on a national level, which exonyms have become obsolete. There are exonyms which are still in daily use in newspapers within a region, but are no longer or scarcely known in other parts of the country (e.g. German "Martinach" for French "Martigny"). One can observe also that along the language borders the people representing the language minority make extensively use of exonyms.

A certain trend towards a reduction of the number of exonyms is obvious. But there are no means to force such a development, at least not on a regional or on a national level.

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5 Offizielles Kursbuch / Indicateur officiel / Orario ufficiale / Urari uffizial / Official Timetable.- Verlag Schweizerische Bundesbahnen / Edition Chemins de fer fédéraux suisses / Edizione Ferrovie federali svizzere/ Chasa editura Viafiero federalas svizras / Editor Swiss Federal Railways. Berne, semi-annual editions.

6 Glossarium Helvetiae Historicum I (Toponyme).- Band 1 des Historischen Lexikons der Schweiz. Hans Rohr Verlag, Zürich, 1991. 199 p.

7 Schweizer Weltatlas / Atlas mondial suisse / Atlante mondiale svizzero.- Herausgegeben von der Konferenz Kantonaler Erziehungsdirektoren. Zürich 1992 (im Druck).

7. Minority Languages

In the census of 1980 (the results of the 1990 census will be available only in 1993) the inhabitants answered the question "In what language do you mostly think and speak?", the question for the so-called mother-language, as follows:

German	4'140'901	inhabitants	65,0 %
French	1'172'502		18,4 %
Italian	622'226		9,8 %
Rheto-roman	51'128		0,8 %
other languages	379'203		6,0 %

By constitution German, French Italian and Rheto-roman are the national languages, the first three of them the official languages. Some Cantons also have more than one official language, namely

Fribourg / Freiburg	French and German
Bern / Berne	German and French
Valais / Wallis	French and German
Graubünden / Grigioni / Grischun	German, Italian and Rheto-roman

International Cooperation

Switzerland is active in the Dutch-German-speaking Division of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names. There would be definitely some interest to participate also in the Helleno-Roman Division, but lack of financial subsidies hindered any activities so far. The rapporteur functions also as the Swiss member in the StAGN (Ständiger Ausschuss für Geographische Namen), the multinational committee for geographic names in German language. Having no national names committee with official status in Switzerland, recruitment for participation in meetings and other activities happens on an ad-hoc basis and is supported only by the institution the respective participant belongs to.

According to a mutual agreement, the editor of this report functions as a coordinator in national and international affairs concerning geographical names, with alternatives in the Federal Office of Topography. Correspondence may therefore be addressed as follows:

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8. Conclusions

In multilingual Switzerland the general public has always been very sensitive on any change or mistake in the spelling of geographic names. Therefore provision has been made four decades ago to organize the treatment of toponyms in a decentralized way. The decrees that were issued at that time, partly revised in the meantime, function to everybody's satifaction still today. Any measures to internal organizational changes therefore have low priority in this country. However, new initiatives have been taken to provide the international community with the information on geographic names needed.